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Medical tourism, also known as medical travel or health tourism is the practice of travelling across international borders to receive medical attention and health care. While this is supposedly a new global trend, it dates back to when Greek pilgrims traveled to Epidauria, a small territory in the Saronic Gulf, which is believed to be the sanctuary of the healing god, Asklepios.

Lower cost of health care in foreign countries is the main selling point of medical tourism. For example, a medical procedure like the coronary bypass costs about $80,000 in the US while it is only over $10,000 in India. While every type of health care is available, health travelers typically pursue cardiac surgery, dental surgery, and cosmetic surgery. For many, medical tourism is an attractive option, since it combines affordable health care with the opportunities offered by local tourism.

However, the downsides of medical tourism have to do with the legal and ethical issues surrounding it. Medical treatments obtained abroad may not be covered by the patient's personal insurance. Moreover, patients are not ensured of proper compensation in case something goes wrong because the countries offering medical tourism have weak malpractice laws. Post-operative care is minimal and patients tend to spend their recuperation period taking advantage of the local exotic attractions, exposing them to the risk of infectious disease.

To reduce the risks, medical tourists are advised to compile a list of accredited hospitals that offers the procedure they need. Since accreditation certifies that the medical organization is competent, authorized, and credible, it guarantees that the hospital personnel, facility, and equipment meet quality standards. These accreditation systems ensure the health care and well-being of the medical tourists.

Accreditation is a rigorous process of assessment done by an independent accrediting body. In this case, the health care organization offering medical tourism services must demonstrate to the accrediting bodies that they have the resources, the personnel, training, experience, and regulatory understanding necessary to give their patients quality health care and medical treatment. Certification made possible by accreditation systems protects medical tourists by weeding out the hospitals with unreliable medical practices.

The Joint Commission International (JCI), a subsidiary of the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO), is a primary accrediting body for international hospitals worldwide. Accrediting bodies have different accreditation systems depending on the focus or area of healthcare development. For instance, an accrediting organization like the Trent Accreditation Scheme develops individualized standards of care, the International Organization for Standardization focuses on hospital management accreditation, and the Society for International Healthcare develops communication between international hospitals.

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